

ABORIGINAL DRAWINGS IN ROCK SHELTERS AT  
BUNDANOON, N.S. WALES.

By W. W. THORPE, Ethnologist.

(Plates xciii.-xcvi.)

Whilst on a collecting visit to Bundanoon in October of last year, my attention was directed to the existence of two Rock-Shelters which contained Aboriginal Pictographs. Bundanoon is about ninety-seven miles from Sydney on the southern railway. The shelters are situated close to Patrick or Paddy's River (which runs fairly parallel to the line, about a mile south of Bundanoon. The "river" referred to is a sluggish stream, and when the writer saw it, consisted of a chain of ponds or billabongs, some very deep and noted for eels (*Anguilla*, sp.), the same fish being freely depicted in one of the shelters.

Paddy's River rises at Exeter and unites with the Wollondilly, near Goulburn, one hundred and thirty-six miles south-west of Sydney. For purpose of convenience the shelters will be referred to as "No. 1" and "No. 2," being the order in which they were shown to the writer.

Both are of the usual form found wherever the Hawkesbury Sandstone occurs and frequently used by the Aborigines for camping in, the cooking of food, and sometimes for burial.

Shelter No. 1 is close to the river on the eastern side, not far from a crossing or ford. No. 2 Shelter is about a quarter of a mile south of No. 1 on the western side of the river and one hundred yards from the latter on elevated ground. The dimensions of the first shelter are as follows:—Greatest height, ten feet; the ceiling shelving back to four feet from the ground, the length on the floor being about thirty feet. In this shelter most of the drawings are made on the ceiling. The second example is much larger, and immediately under the centre of the eaves is a large sandstone block (Pl. xciv.) displaying about twenty grooves resulting from the rubbing-down and sharpening of axe-heads, the water during rainy seasons dripping from the roof assisting in the process. The following are the measurements of Shelter No. 2:—Seven feet high, fifteen feet from front to back, and forty-five feet long on the floor. Plate xciii. is taken rather from the northern end of the shelter, and

hardly does justice to the size of the recess. The material used in the drawings is charcoal with a probable admixture of grease, as the pigment appears to have penetrated the stone, and will not rub off on the hand.

The shelters and drawings have been known for forty years. Aborigines have not been resident in the district during that period, though parties of them have been known to pass through.

The following is a description of the pictographs that were observed in them :—In the first, which I call No. 1 Shelter (Pl. xcv.), there is a figure representing what I suppose to be a conventional animal or perhaps the tail of a lyre-bird (*Menura*, sp.); another which I think is undoubtedly a representation of an eel (*Anguilla*, sp.); as stated elsewhere, the river at this place is noted for these fish; the next is probably a Goana (*Varanus*, sp.) or water lizard (*Physignatus*, sp.), but the rear portions of the figure have weathered away, rendering identification difficult; another is a nondescript object, which may possibly have been intended for a human being; and there is the figure of a turtle.<sup>1</sup>

In the second, which I call No. 2 Shelter (Pl. xcvi.), I observed figures representing an aboriginal corroboree, with portions of six performers, a very old drawing and much weathered; probably a frog with its mouth agape; a figure somewhat lacertilian in outline, but not well drawn; a rather puzzling representation, for which I cannot suggest what the artist intended; another which looks like a fish, possibly a mullet (*Mugil*, sp.); one that is probably a tribal mark, the chevron motive is the same as frequently occurs on aboriginal carved trees; then there is what looks like a shell, a shield, or a leaf; a human being; and finally a figure which I think is undoubtedly meant for a shield.

The drawings are not the work of the same artist, nor were they contemporaneously drawn. Generally speaking, the pictographs in Shelter No. 1 are the oldest.

In trying to search out records of similitude in objects depicted I find that Dr. W. E. Roth<sup>2</sup> refers to "saurian type of figures (lizards, &c.) painted in red ochre upon blocks of granite." While the foregoing are not figured the same author gives a representation of a human being<sup>3</sup> which closely resembles Fig. 8 of Shelter 2.

<sup>1</sup> A turtle drawing is figured by Worsnop—Prehist. Arts, &c., Ab. of Austr., 1897, pl. xviii., fig. 1; and Bassett-Smith—Journ. Anthropol. Inst., xxiii., 1893, pl. xviii. (in part).

<sup>2</sup> Roth—Ethnol. Studies, 1897, sect. 187.

Most of the animals drawn in charcoal at Bundanoon have been represented in rock carvings and figured by Mr. W. D. Campbell.<sup>4</sup> Special attention may be directed to the following. Shields occur frequently as carvings, likewise fish and turtle, whilst gravings of the human figure are freely made along with other objects of natural history.

From these comparisons it will be apparent that the Aborigines did not depict certain objects with pigment and carve others, but all were produced by either method.

As far as the Bundanoon pictographs are concerned, I do not think the objects have any ritual significance or esoteric meaning. Their presence may be accounted for in the following manner. "Art," we are told, "is the expression of human emotion in drawing, music, ornamentation, &c." Perhaps in the personnel of a tribe one or more of its members possessed a penchant for drawing, and the artistic taste has expressed itself on these rough walls.

Some of the objects are fairly true to nature, others again are below the average of Aboriginal art.

Fig. 3, Shelter No. 1, is a characteristic attitude of the laceratilians, while the corroboree has often been depicted better elsewhere. The nearest approach to the pictures which form the subject of this paper are those drawn on bark (in colours) from Essington Island, North Australia, and figured by Dr. J. C. Cox.<sup>5</sup>

A series of charcoal drawings was figured by Mr. Bassett Smith,<sup>6</sup> discovered by him at Parry Island, North-West Australia.

A great deal has been written and figured on this subject, namely, the mural art of the Australian Aborigines, and I have sought out some references which may be useful for comparison and study.

Mr. R. Brough-Smyth, in his voluminous work,<sup>7</sup> records many instances of animals, etc., depicted in caves. E. M. Curr<sup>8</sup> also mentions the occurrence of shelter pictographs. While brief reference is made to the subject in their "Northern Tribes,"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Roth—*Loc. cit.*, fig. 280.

<sup>4</sup>Campbell—*Aborig. Carvings of Port Jackson & Broken Bay* (Mem. Geol. Survey N.S.Wales, Eth. Series, i., 1899).

<sup>5</sup>Cox—*Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.Wales*, iii., 1878, pt. ii., pls. xv.-xvi.

<sup>6</sup>Bassett-Smith—*Loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup>Smyth—*Aborigines Vict.*, ii., 1878, p. 222 (appendix).

<sup>8</sup>Curr—*Austr. Race*, i., 1886, p. 95; ii., pp. 403 and 476.

<sup>9</sup>Spencer and Gillen—*Northern Tribes Cent. Austr.*, 1904, p. 716.

Spencer and Gillen devote a chapter to describing the rock drawings of the Central Tribes.<sup>10</sup> The Rev. John Mathew<sup>11, 12</sup> deals with the better class of (native?) art, "where higher artistic skill has been exhibited," including those paintings discovered by Sir George Grey<sup>13</sup> on the Glenelg River, North-West Australia.

A resumé of the subject has been compiled by Mr. T. Worsnop.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. W. E. Roth<sup>15</sup> also describes certain drawings executed by Aborigines in Queensland.

W. D. Campbell's<sup>16</sup> masterly Monograph has already been referred to, in which the local rock drawings are exhaustively described.

Last but not least are the occasional papers by Mr. R. Etheridge<sup>17</sup> describing mural art at Burraborang, Milton, Kuringai and Copmanhurst, all in New South Wales. The first-named locality is that nearest Bundanoon, being about forty miles north-east of the latter.

The Bundanoon shelters are known to many of the local residents, and the mark of the vandal is already in evidence as monograms, etc., but recent additions may easily be distinguished from native art by the way the latter has penetrated the stone.

In conclusion I have to thank Mr. Samuel Tooth, Junr., who guided me to the shelters, and Mr. W. A. Nicholas who at some personal inconvenience prepared photographs of Shelter No. 2 and the rubbing stone. My colleague, Mr. A. R. McCulloch, assisted me willingly with suggestions in the preparation of the figures from my rough field sketches.

<sup>10</sup> Spencer and Gillen—*Nat. Tribes Cent. Austr.*, 1899, p. 614, et seq.

<sup>11</sup> Mathew—*Eaglehawk & Crow*, 1899, chapt. x.

<sup>12</sup> Mathew—*Journ. Anthropol. Inst. Gt. Brit.*, xxiii., pp. 42-52, pls. iv.-vii.

<sup>13</sup> Grey—*Journ. Two Expeditions Discov. N.W. & W. Austr.*, 1837-9.

<sup>14</sup> See *ante*.

<sup>15</sup> Roth—*Eth. Studies*, 1897, sect. 187; and *Bulletin* 4, sect. 10.

<sup>16</sup> See *ante*.

<sup>17</sup> Etheridge—*Rec. Austr. Mus.*, ii., 4, pp. 46-54, pl. xii.; v., 2, pp. 80-5; v., 2, pp. 118-20, pls. xii.-xiii.; v., 5, pp. 271-3, pl. xxxiii.